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# The City of London and the Syrian Resettlement Initiative: Lessons Learned

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The City of London and the Syrian Resettlement Initiative:  
Lessons Learned

MPA Research Report

Submitted to

The Local Government Program  
Department of Political Science  
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Victoria Parada  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this document is to evaluate the City of London's experience with the Syrians resettlement initiation in order to identify lessons that can be used to enhance London's capacity to confront similar experiences. What are the main lessons learned by the City of London from Syrian Resettlement Initiative? This document will identify the positive and negative aspects of the work done by the City of London and the organizations in charge of settlement. The number of Syrian refugees that were accepted in London, added to the short time that the city had to prepare the settlement and integration of the Syrian refugees has been one of the biggest challenges the city has had. Fortunately, the experience, knowledge and joint work of City Hall, the organizations, the churches and the private sector have made the work lent in an optimal way, strengthening it for future situations.

For the elaboration of this research, information was collected mainly from journal articles, TV videos, online government Website and government publications about the processes and cases of the Syrian refugees since the beginning of the war in Syria, the life in the refugee camps, the decision of Canada to receive a large number of Syrians in order to help that population, until the arrival and settling in London.

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## INTRODUCTION

London, Ontario has faced one of the biggest challenges in the world after the Second World War with the massive arrival of Syrian refugees. Despite the existence of organizations responsible for the settlement of immigrants, the mass arrival of Syrian refugees has put the city's experience to the test with respect to the services it provides to immigrants.

To analyze the lessons learned in the city of London regarding the settlement of Syrians refugees, it is essential to understand the situations that the Syrians had to overcome. I will begin the document by making a brief summary of the conflict in Syria, the life of the Syrians in the refugee camps, the decision and the arrival to Canada of the Syrians in 2015. This information is important to bring in the document as it will help to understand the work of settlement that London has been facing.

The conflict in Syria began seven years ago. Some young people decided to protest against the Syrian government by painting some graffiti and the government responded by arresting and killing some of them. Due to this event, an unprecedented civil war generated the fled of many Syrians to European and American countries seeking refuge. But the war continues in Syria and to this day the Syrian government does not want to negotiate with the opposition. Many Syrians have died and others have fled the country seeking refuge in other places in Syria and in the refugee camps of neighboring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and other countries in Europe and in North America.

Due to the number of deaths of the Syrians escaping from the country and the overpopulation of the refugee camps, the Syrians began to move to European cities. Although it is known that refugee camps are temporary homes, cases like the Syrians have turned refugee camps into permanent homes since war is still going on. Due to the fled of thousands of Syrians, many of these European cities were not prepared for their arrival either for their regulations or their lack of resources. It is then in 2015 when Canada appears offering its support to the Syrians. Canada, which has always stood out for its trajectory of receiving immigrants and its knowledge related to settlement takes the decision in 2015 of receiving 25 thousand Syrians that would be distributed over different cities and Provinces. It is here where London emerges becoming the third city in Ontario after Toronto and Hamilton and the seventh city in Canada to receive the largest number of Syrian refugees. By June 2018 London has received more than 2,400 Syrians since 2015 and may be receiving more in the coming months. This means that London has taken in about five per cent of all the Syrian immigrants who have arrived in Canada. This is an extraordinary number as London makes up only 1.4 per cent of the country's overall population, according to the 2016 census data. (Bieman, 2018)

During the realization of this document, it has been found that London has had to face big challenges during the settlement process and in many cases. Fortunately, there have been more successes than the failures obtained, which will be shown throughout this document. In order to highlight the lessons learned and the findings that must be improved, the document will be divided into three Chapters. The first Chapter of the document contains a background that includes a brief history of the Syrian conflict, life in the refugee camps, Canada's Decision and the arrival to Canada. The second Chapter refers to Syrian settlement in London. This part

includes the general aspect of the settling of Syrian refugee in London, the challenge for London to fulfill the needs, organizations in charge of the setting and first assistance on arriving in London; the third chapter is related with the main lesson on the areas of Employment, Housing, Culture and Health: and the final part offers the reflections and conclusions.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **1.1. Brief history of the Syrian war**

Before the conflict in Syria began, the citizens were complaining about high unemployment, the corruption of the government and the lack of political freedom under the actual president. After seven years of war, Syria is in ruins. This war full of torture, bombings and chemical weapons has left more than 400,000 Syrians dead and an average of 5.6 million Syrian refugees. (United Nations, 2018)

To understand the context of the conflict Syria I will do a small background of the president in Syria. The father of Syria's president, Hafez Assad, died at the age of 69, having ruled Syria for almost 30 years. His son Bashar studied ophthalmology in London England. When his father died, Bashar al-Assad was elected for a seven-year term as President of Syria. When Bashar came to the presidency he promised to make some reforms, such as eliminating corruption and modernizing the country by bringing the Internet and cell phones to Syria. But instead of improving the country, the situation was still due to economic problems, the high rate of

unemployment, the lack of political freedom and the concentration of wealth only in a few that govern the country. (Tarabay, 2018)

A movement emerges in Tunisia called "Arab Spring" with the Tunisia revolution. The effect of this revolutionary movement appears in Syria with a group of young people who decided to protest peacefully against the government of Bashar in the city of Dara'a drawing graffiti in the wall of schools of the city. This is a prodemocracy movement that began in 2010 and spread through other countries such Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Libya. The president arrested and tortured the group of young people who protested. (Manfreda, 2018)

In response to the negative government policies to find resolution of the crisis, more and more Syrians were standings against it not only in the city of Dara'a, but all around the country. The dissident resorts to weapons and the nightmare becomes every day. The government as retaliation applies very severe punishments by killing civilians and even sending bombs in a discriminated manner killing children and civilians.

The opposition to the government is armed and an escalation of violence in Syria is unleashed, generating an unprecedented civil war. According with CCB, *“A UN commission of inquiry has evidence that all parties to the conflict have committed war crimes - including murder, torture, rape and enforced disappearances. They have also been accused of using civilian suffering - such as blocking access to food, water and health services through sieges - as a method of war.”* (CBC, 2016)



In 2013, hundreds of people died due to the rocket attack filled with the nerve agent sarin in the city of Damascus. It is believed that this incident was carried out by the Government of Syria. However, the President did not assume the authorship of these deaths. According to the El Pais, it is believed that Syrians possess one of the largest arsenal in the world of chemical weapons, which include a large amount of mustard gas and a lethal nerve gas called sarin. It is at this point that countries like Russia and the United States intercede with the purpose of making arrangements with Syria to destroy this type of weapon. (Warrick, 2013)

Establishing an exact number of Syrians who have fled the country and how many have died is very imprecise. According to CNN more than 5.6 million Syrians have fled of the country and more than 6 million people move internally seeking refugee within the same country. Escaping from the war and in the constant struggle to access medical care, schools for young people and food, the Syrians seek refuge in neighboring countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and European countries. (CNN Library, 2018)

## 1.2. Life in Refugee Camps

I consider important to bring at this point the definition of the UN refugee (UNHCR) "*A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group most likely, they can no return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugee fleeing their countries*". (UNHCR, 2018)

Currently the number of refugees is immense. According to the UN, it is believed that there are more than two million Syrian refugees registered in the refugee camps of neighboring Syria. This figure does not include the number of Syrian refugees who have not registered. (Aziz, 2016)

When the Syrians enter a refugee camp they must register and once inside they cannot leave on their own wish, they must ask for authorization. The camps are guarded by security guards who control the daily routines and give security to the refugee camp. Despite the danger that exists in Syria many refugees decide to return to their country because it is very difficult to support the living conditions in the refugee camps.

The following are some important aspects of the life of the Syrian refugees in the refugee camps.

Employment: One of the biggest problem men face in the refugee camps because there are no industries in the area and there are no markets for employment either. People live out of the help that is given to them. The possibility of work is almost null and the boredom of doing nothing takes over everyone. Life becomes just waiting for the ration of food and water. (Aziz, 2016)

Education: The adaptation of the children in the refugee camps is very difficult. Children wants to go to school but inclusion into the school is almost impossible. In many Syrian camps, there are no books or materials for the classes. Children spend their time playing and from one place to another. Some camps offer recreational activities such as sports and crafts to entertain them and to pass the time. (Aziz, 2016)

Health: Acute and infectious diseases such as anemia, diabetes, hypertension and mental illness found in the Syrians, reflect the challenges related to displacement, overcrowding and sanitation in the refugee camps (Syrian Refugee Health Profile, p.2 2016). The access to health care depends on the country of asylum and whether refugee lives in a refugee camp or in an urban settlement. According with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Disease, *“UNCHR reported that the majority (72.1%) of primary healthcare visits in Zaatari camp (Jordan) were due to communicable diseases. Noncommunicable diseases (21.8%), injuries (4.8%), and mental illness (1.3%) were also noted as reasons for seeking primary care. Similarly, the majority of primary healthcare visits in Iraq and Lebanon were due to communicable diseases. Notably, primary healthcare visits attributed to non-communicable diseases accounted for just 7.4% and 8.3% of all primary healthcare visits in Iraq and Lebanon, respectively.”* (Syrian Refugee Health Profile, p.8 2016)

Housing: As is known, refugees live in well-tended tents as permanent homes, so they are exposed to the inclement weather. The bathrooms must be shared among several and the showers are scarce, in some refugee camps the possibility of having a shower to bathe happen only twice a week. To sleep they use mattresses that they must collect every morning to have more space inside the tent. (Aziz, 2016)

Food: Inside the refugee camps, families are given coupons for their food, usually twice a month. Families buy with the coupons beans, rice, butter and canned goods because there is no refrigerator. Each family should be responsible for cooking their own food in kitchens that are

shared with other families. The water problem is severe; families must make long lines to receive bottles of water for human consumption and to fill the buckets of water with which they must wash their belongings or cleaning utensils. (Aziz, 2016)

Due to the conditions of the refugee camps mentioned above, there is a massive exit of Syrian refugees from the refugee camps. Thousands of refugees could suddenly decide to go towards Europe countries. (Marks, 2015) Although not all Syrians come to Canada from refugee camps, all have official refugee status given by UN.

### **1.3. Canada's Decision**

The appointed prime minister, Justin Trudeau during his election campaign promised that in his government he would accept at least 25,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq who should arrive by the end of 2015.

The challenge for Canada was not easy at all. Canada has been known worldwide for its humanitarian aid. The majority of the 25,000 Syrians who arrived in Canada were the poorest and most vulnerable. A great number of the families had a woman as the head of the family since their husbands had died in the war, while Europe was accepting too many young men. (Mackinnon, 2016)

From the beginning, Canada knew the problems that could arise, especially with housing, due to the shortage of housing, medical care, security checks and criminal checks. Another major

challenge was that none or almost none spoke English or French and many of the children had not even attended any school.

However, some Canadian settlement groups saw this decision with great concern due to the short preparation time they had. Counting on the knowledge due to his experience and foreseeing the amount of challenges that could arise in the settlement of the Syrians, Chris Friesen, the President of the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance – CISSA, warned that the time of arrival of the Syrians should be reconsidered and that the number of refugees could be preserved. He stated that *"Providing more time for this large resetting movement will lead to better reset outcomes."* (CBC News, 2015).

The homework was not simple and this preparation had to begin before the arrival of the Syrians in Canada.

#### **1.4. Arriving to Canada**

Canada also has always stood out as the multicultural country per excellence. It has always been a country of immigrants. The role immigrant's play is very important for the evolution and the future of the country. Erin Tolley and Robert Young said *"Yet no other developed country admits to a flow of about two-thirds of the total population every year, and Canada stands as the most accomplished exponents. Officially, the country embraces tolerance, pluralism, equal treatment, and respect for the diversity of cultures are here, and this virtue is commonly found in practice, however, newsworthy are exceptions to this pattern "*. (Tolley and Young, p. 295)

Canada's refugee system is regulated by the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. This Act protects those seeking refugee outside or inside the country. This Law “*sets out the core principles and concepts that govern Canada's immigration and refugee protection programs, including provisions relating to requirements and selection, examination and inadmissibility.*” (Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 2017)

Also, Canada is a party of the United Nations 1951, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. “*On 4 June 1969, Canada signed the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 18 years after it was adopted by the United Nations.*

*Since Canada signed the Refugee Convention, it has gained the enviable reputation of being a world leader in protecting refugees. There are important successes to celebrate. There are also significant shortcomings that call for action.*” (Canadian Council for Refugee, 2018)

The application process and refugee resettlement assistance is handled by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).

As mentioned above, Canada has experience in the settlement of refugees, however due to the number of Syrians received and the short time of preparation the challenge was enormous. All levels of government have had to work mainly on aspects related to immigration, housing, work, health, language, foster civic involvement, cultural knowledge and emotional support.

Canada has contributed to international protection efforts for the settlement of refugees with three refugee categories:

- Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR): This is a program where refugees are suggested to Canada for resettlement by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) or another organization. Refugee who is sponsored by GAR is entirely supported for the government to one year from the day they arrive in Canada or until they are able to support themselves. (Government of Canada, 2018)
- Privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR): It is a program where Canadian citizen and permanent residents can participate in the resettlement of refugees from other countries. (Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, 2018)
- Blended Visa Office Referred Refugee (BVOR): This program is organized to settlement refugees identify by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and submitted by Canadian visa office broad. Refugees resettled under this program receive income support from the Government of Canada through the RAP Program for 6 months and PSR offer another 6 months of financial support. (Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, 2018)

The Government offers the income support program under the Government's Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) that specializes in refugee settlement in Canada. Refugee Sponsorship Training Program *“is a contribution program through which the Government of Canada provides assistance for resettled refugees to establish themselves in their new home. The program has two main components: income support and a range of immediate essential services. The income support also has two components: start up allowances and monthly income support.”* (Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, 2018) The start-up allowances cover the GAR and contain a one-time payment that covers the initial cost of settlement in Canada. The allowances

include staple allowance, basic household needs allowance, furniture allowance, regular and seasonal clothing allowance, winter clothing allowance, utility installation allowance, linens allowance and school start-up allowance. Monthly income support cover basic needs such as food, incidentals, shelter, transportation and a communication allowance.

According to data from 2017, a total of 40,081 Syrians has been received in Canada since 2015, distributed as follows:

Total Syrians 40,081

<b>Number of Refugees</b>	<b>Refugee Category</b>
40,081	Syrian refugees have arrived Canada
3,931	Blended visa office referred refugee (BVOR)
21,876	Government assisted refugees (GAR)
14,274	Privately sponsored refugees (PSR)

Data of a January 29, 2017

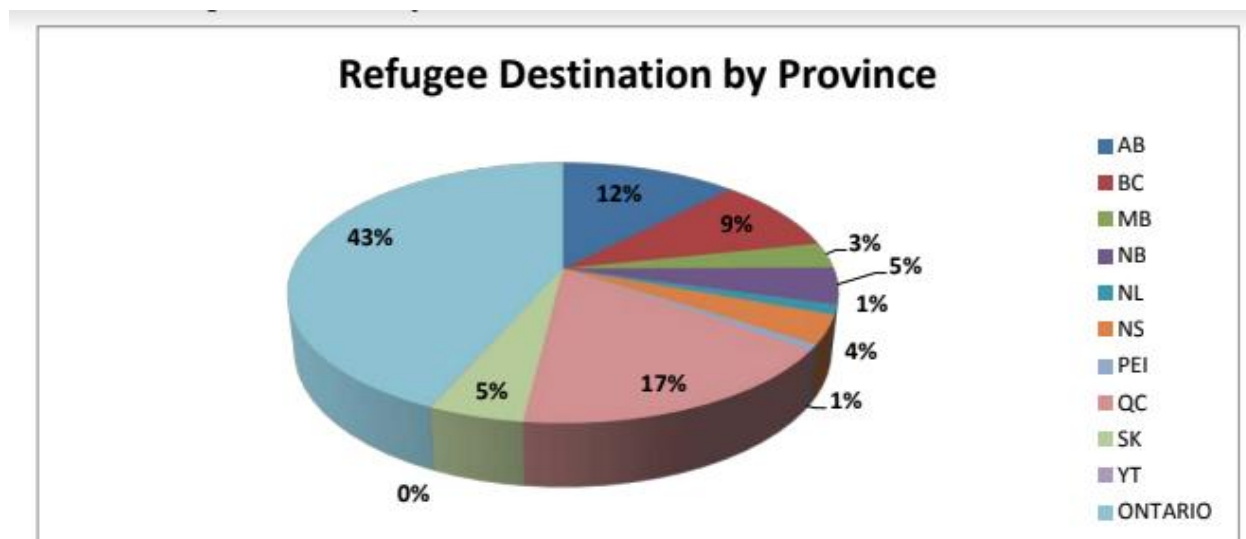
Note: Reproduced from Government of Canada. Welcoming in Canada (2017)

In the period between December 10th, 2015 and February 10th, 2016, a total of 18,079 refugees arrived in Canada and a total of 71 flights arrived in Toronto (41) and Montreal (30).

(Government-Organized flights from December 10th, 2015 to February 10th, 2016.)

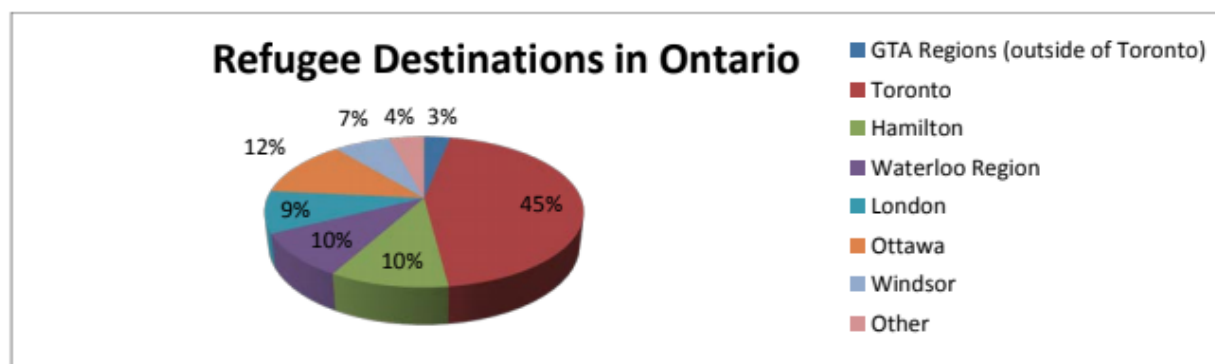


Chart 1



Prepared for Government- Organized Flight

Chart 2



Prepared for Government- Organized Flight

Based on the Chart 1, Ontario reached 43% that is 7,825 Syrians refugees during the period through December 10<sup>th</sup> 2015 to February 10<sup>th</sup> 2016.

According to Chart 2 the total of Syrians who arrived in London was 726 refugees during the period of December 10th, 2015 and February 10th, 2016. Given the information of Ivanov, I., El-Sayegh and T Dam, from London Cross Cultural Learner Centre the total of Syrian Government-Assisted Refugee who arrived in London was 1105 during January to December 2016. By 2018, according to the London Free Press, a total of 2400 Syrians refugees have arrived in London. (Bieman, 2018)

Having explained the general aspects about the decision making to bring the Syrians, the different programs that the government has for the settlement of refugees and the quantity of Syrian refugees arriving in Canada and Ontario, I will analyze the settlement process in the city of London.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SYRIANS SETTLEMENT IN LONDON, ONTARIO**

#### **2.1. General aspects of the settling of Syrian refugees in London**

London is the eleventh largest city in Canada and third in Ontario. Due to its location, the city provides a good settlement system within Canada for any immigrant. The welcome to the Syrians became the main task of the whole city in 2015. The Mayor of the City of London, Matt Brown, sent a message to the community over television where he stressed the need for all to work together, the City Hall staff, the community at large and all the leaders and organizations to put together a program to get ready for the arrival of the Syrians refugees to London. According to the Mayor;

*"There are people out there that are living in crisis looking for an opportunity for themselves and for their families, and when they come to a country like Canada, and when they become Canadian citizens their life changes. They contribute to our society just as any other Canadian contributes to our society."* (Video - TV Show-The Muslim View, Ep.26)

Every politician and dignitaries from the City of London expressed the importance for the community to work together and to welcome the Syrians once arrived. Peter Frangiskatos, MP from London North Center, expressed the need to accept the Syrians, he stressed that integration takes time and that it is important to work together towards this integration to succeed. Deb Matthews, Deputy of Ontario said that Canada has a long history of helping people around the world and that Ontario is ready to support Syrians refugees. (Video - TV Show-The Muslim View, Ep.26).

Large number of community organizations came together in support of the Syrians organizing an incredible fundraising effort where donations raised were not only monetary but of clothes, socks, pajamas, toys, cleaning utensils, and food, were also received. More than 11 organizations were ready to work together and several organizations in London helped on the settlement of immigrants.

It is important to highlight the effort of the City Hall to work in a coordinated and structured way with all the organizations, churches, mosques and school boards, who made a great welcome to the Syrian refugees so that they felt at home. For example, the London Islamic School participated in the fundraising for Syrians by welcoming the first Syrian refugees sponsored by

the government and by the private sector where they collected a sum of money to help them. The priority of the community was to make Syrians feel a part of the London family, to feel comfortable, safe and free. (Video - TV Show-The Muslim View, Ep.29)

## 2.2. The challenge for London to fulfill the needs

Due to London's location, the quantity of settlement organizations and the tranquility of life, makes it an attractive city for immigrants. However, the growth of the population of the city has not been enough, so London must continue to attract immigrants to grow. This is what Norman de Bono, a London Free Press reporter, said:

*“On average, the city's population grows at less than one per cent a year but that number shrank by nearly a third from 2010 to 2016, and will continue to get smaller, and that's a threat to job creation, said the report to the city's community and protective services committee.”* (De Bono, 2018)

The growth of the population is putting on alert the administrators of the city, to that respect Norman de Bono add the following; *"The city needs to have an annual population growth of about 4,000 to ensure economic growth,"* (De Bono, 2018)

With this regards the vice-president of business development at Trudell Medical Ltd said *“We are looking at about a two per cent decline every year in that growth number. It is declining, it will continue to decline,”* (De Bono, 2018)

There are several reasons why the population of London has been decreasing: 1) A large percentage is made up of students who once they finish their studies leave the City, 2) The proximity to a big city makes many immigrants look for work in Toronto, and 3) People are having fewer children.

Regarding to the retention of new immigrants Councilor Phil Squire said “*We have not done a good job retaining students. There is room for everyone. Immigration is the key to developing the city and without it we will see negative population growth*” (De Bono, 2018)

Although the growth of immigrants has been significant, London is still lagging behind the number of immigrants arriving in the city. Norman de Bono in London Free Press said, “*But the London area still lags in overall immigration, with people from other countries accounting for 19.5 per cent of its population, far below the Ontario average of 29 per cent and well off the national average of 21.9 per cent.*” (De Bono, 2018)

Joaquin Balles co-chair of the newcomer strategy and leader of a group that links newcomers with area employers said to the London Free Press, “*There’s a concern as far as us being able to grow economically and in a sustainable fashion. Newcomers play a very important role in that,*” (Stacey, 2018)

The decision of London is to receive more than 2,400 Syrians. This is the most ambitious mass resettlement plan. To increase the workforce, a strategic plan has been proposed to help attract and hold immigrants to London. (Bieman, 2018)

### 2.3. Organizations in charge of the settling

The City Hall provided indirect support to the process of the arrival and settling of the Syrian refugees. A community meeting was held on December 16, 2015 where members of the LMLIP brought the need to understand the context of the situation at all levels of government; Federal, Provincial, Municipal and the City of London. During the meeting sessions on: Welcome and Inclusion, Settlement, Housing, Employment, Education and Health where the topic of discussion. The goal was to gather as much information from each organization and agency present, what was the missing information on all topics, what information can be share from each organization and the most important, what contribution can each organization or agency make.

The first task the City Hall established was to set a basic plan led by the London Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LIP). The goal: To organize a Syrian Welcome Taskforce. This organization *“is a collaborative community initiative. LMLIP is one of close to 35 Local Immigration Partnerships across Ontario funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and supported by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO). LMLIP is co-led by the City of London.”* (London Immigration Partnership, 2018) This organization prepared the initial information and started the coordination with several settlement organizations and other sectors such as schools from all boards, employment agencies, religious groups, ethnic communities, and private agencies and businesses to come together to analyze and coordinate the delivery of services where support was needed.

Many organizations join the Syrian Welcome Taskforce and started working for the arrival of the Syrian refugees in London since day one:

- City of London
- London Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership.
- Religious Organizations: Metropolitan United Church, The Islamic Center of Southwest Ontario, The London Muslim Mosque, St. Andrew Memorial Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church, Byron United Church, St. Aidan's Anglican Church of London.
- Settlement Organizations: Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC), South London Community Neighborhood Resource Center, LUSO, YMCA.
- Financial Organizations: Libro Credit Union.
- Employment organizations: Employment Pathway, Wil, Muslim Association of Canada London Chapter.
- Educational organizations: King's University College, Fanshawe College, Western University and College Boreal, Thames Valley District School Board, London District Catholic School Board.
- Recreational organizations: Boys and Girls Club, London Museum, Tourism London.
- Community organizations: Merry Mount Children Centre and ACFOLA.
- Women Organizations: Single Women in Motherhood (SWIM)
- Health: Middlesex London Health Unit.

All Boards of education, public and private, made an important contribution in London. The London District Catholic school board, the Thames Valley District school board and many private schools were gearing up to welcome refugee children and teens.

The enthusiasm of the community to receive and support the arrival of the Syrian refugees to London was present from the beginning. All the organizations were ready to welcome the newcomers. It is worth noting the great work done by the Islamic Center of South West Ontario with the youngster population. (Video-TV show- The Muslim View - ICSWO 27 2016)

#### **2.4. First assistance on arrival in London.**

The first Federal sponsored Syrians arrived in Toronto. During their first 24 hours, they went through medical tests and the study of criminal records. On their second day, the selected refugees boarded a shuttle bus heading to London where they arrived at the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre settlement agency, the main refugee settlement agency in London with lots of experience conducting settlements.

Upon their arrival, they had a health check where they were evaluated to see if they needed special treatments. The organization made sure that the families received information about the weather, winter security measurements as found over snowfall or freezing days. Later same day the families were temporarily housed in one of the houses of the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre, Jeremiah's House, or in the, Saint Joseph's House. These houses are the reception center for refugees in London. An average of 30 people in Saint Joseph's House and 60 in Jeremiah's House are housed on private rooms with common dining area and shared bathrooms. The



agency provides sheets, towels and clean utensils. The agency was also in charge of assigning a case manager for one year and a settlement adviser until they become Canadian citizens.

(Dubinski, 2015)

Due to the number of Syrian refugees arriving at the same time it was required to contract hotels in the city, generating more responsibilities for the staff of the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre. Many other tasks taken by the LCCLC were to drive all Syrians to community integration programs and courses, to bring the food from Arab restaurants of the city to their places, provide recreation for children, coordinate translation and interpretation for most of them on almost all the daily activities.

Help for the settlement of the Syrians has come from all corners of the City; the Syrians received coupons from agencies such as St. Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army and Goodwill to get clothes. Various orientation sessions were organized. These sessions included personal orientation sessions and language classes. They were also invited for a Christmas dinner on December 24.

(Dubinski, 2015)

London also became the home of many Syrians refugees sponsored by private companies. By the end of 2016 London received at least 75 privately-sponsored Syrian refugee families.

According to London Free Press, *“Most of the first wave of Syrian refugees will be privately sponsored; meaning church groups and other organizations are footing the bill for their arrival and initial year of living in Canada.”* (Dubinski, 2015)

Canada continues to be one of the most generous countries, with one of the best immigration and refugee system in the world. London, with the arrival of the Syrians has become an important part of the process being the third city in Ontario with the most Syrian refugees. The city, the organizations, the churches and the community in general made positively the joint work for the reception and accommodation of the Syrians. However, there are some aspects related to employment, housing, education, culture and health that must be analyzed to provide a better service for similar situations in the future.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **MAIN LESSONS**

#### **3.1. Employment**

To understand the problem of employment for Syrians it is essential to understand what a job is and its importance in the life of Syrian refugees. Employment or lack of employment is perhaps the biggest problem facing Syrian refugees. In most cases the lack of employment leads to psychological problems, lack of security and weakness. Employment is an important part of the human being not only because of receiving a salary, but it is about being able to pay for leisure activities and to feel valued and productive within a society. At work new skills are developed, meet people in the work to expand the social networks and transfer learned skills into employment. Working helps to gain a sense of pride and satisfaction by reaffirming self-confidence of being able to maintain oneself.

According to Susan Heathfield, "*Employment is an agreement between an employer and an employee that the employee will provide certain services on the job.*" (Heathfield, June 18, 2018). This is a good definition; however, I believe that employment means more than an agreement between two parties. When people have had a job their whole lives they do not see the difference but when they lose their job or in the worst case a situation like the one that many refugees have experienced, work becomes the goal of life, it is like going back to be reborn.

During the conducted research, it has been found that one of the greatest difficulties that Syrian refugees have had is the lack of employment. I found that there is a need from the government and the organizations to fulfill the newcomers' basic education, training, language skills, and to help them finding employment according.

As mentioned earlier, Syrian refugees arrived in Canada sponsored by the private sector and government-assisted. According with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada "*half of adult PSRs had found employment, compared to 10% of Syrian GARs. Of those who reported having a job, the most common form of employment for both GARs and PSRs were in the Sales and Service occupations. The vast majority of Syrian refugees who were not working at the time of the survey were looking for work or intended to look for work in the near future. The biggest challenge facing both GARs and PSRs in finding a job was associated with learning an official language.*" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, p. 1. 2016)

The situation presented with refugees assisted by the government has been influenced by several factors such as lack of English skills, Canadian work experience, recognition of professional

qualifications, Canadian employment history, and lack of study certificates in the country of origin. While the sponsored refugees by the private sector arrived mostly with knowledge of English and with certified studies, these refugees are benefited by friends and family who already have working contacts as well as the direct collaboration from churches or their private sponsors.

The frustration of finding work is huge, despite the number of organizations in charge of preparing Syrian immigrants for a job; many of them still cannot find a job. With the time, the situation becomes more urgent because the Federal government's assistance is given only for one year.

One of the most important goals with the settlement process is to gain the self-sustainability and this is achieved only through a job and education. Getting a job is more than obtaining a work permit or having the actual income; it is about feeling valued, proud of being able to support yourself and your family.

But getting a job in a new place requires overcoming processes that Syrian refugees have to go through. When they arrive at their destination is when the settlement process begins, and this is a stage that requires time, persistence and a lot of patience. The following are the reasons I consider why it has been easier for the group of private sponsored refugees to get into the labor force:

1. They arrived with a higher level of education.
2. Some already had knowledge of English.
3. Churches or group of people collaborate in the help of job search.
4. Most of them had relatives in London and they helped them find employment.

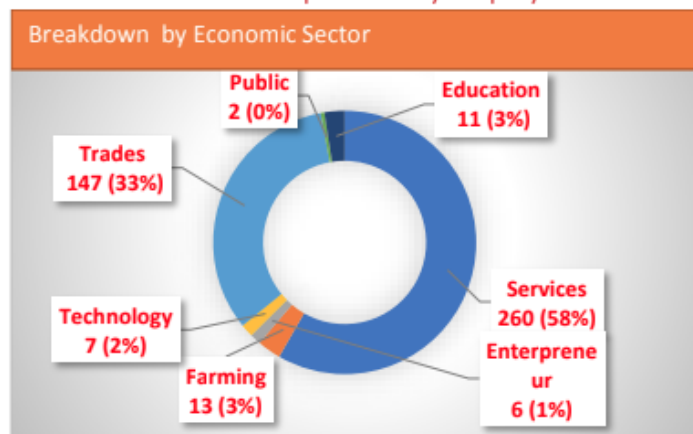
A high level of education adding the possibility of having good communication were the basis for churches or private groups to find work faster for Syrian refugees assisted by the private sector. The challenge of the refugees sponsored by the private sector and sponsored by the government are different, therefore, it is not possible to treat all Syrian refugees under the same conditions. The low levels of education and the lack of knowledge of English were mainly the reasons why most of the assisted by the government will take longer to find a job. These differences are also manifested in the fact that the refugees sponsored by the private sector have more personalized assistance. Adults sponsored by the government do not have as many opportunities to make connections with others. They depend almost in full of the help that can be provided by the agencies in charge. Additionally, they must learn the language as quickly as possible to get a job.

Based on the above and as a lesson learned it is necessary to differentiate the cases of refugees who arrive with high levels of education and knowledge of language. Therefore, government assistance for Syrian refugees who arrive with low levels of education and language should be provided for a longer time.

According to the 2016 Annual Report on Syrian GARS in London, Ontario here is the information regarding the main occupation of the 1195 Syrian who arrived on 2016.

### Professional Statistics

#### Distribution of Adult Population by Employment Sector



Category	Total
Services	260
Farming	13
Entrepreneur	6
Technology	7
Trades	147
Public	2
Education	11

Note: Reproduced from 2016 Annual Report: Syrian GARS in London, Ontario. January-December 2016.

### 3.2. Housing

Having a house is one of the most important things for every human being. Having a house means safety and caring for families but it also means obligations.

Contextualizing the housing aspect of the Syrian refugees, they left their homes seeking shelter in refugee camps having to live in tents for a long time, without privacy, beds, kitchens, dining rooms, and rooms and exposed to the harsh of the weather. After their arrival in Canada they have to stay in temporary shelters while being sent to London. Once they arrive in London, they live temporarily in one of the two houses of the LCCLC or in the hotels that have been rented for that purpose. After those steps and with the help of the organizations in charge of the settlement,

the Syrian refugees sought their permanent homes. But, finding a home for a refugee is not an easy task, they need to be aware of some basic aspects when signing the lease.

Following, I will list the aspects that the Syrian refugees had to learn and to be trained before signing a lease:

1. The regulation of the owners: In Canada, the first and last month should be canceled in advance, which generates more money for housing accommodation, this is called security deposit. This money is held by the landlord as a guarantee that the rent is not paid, or the house is too dirty. These leases in Canada are done for one year. When you are going to rent an apartment in Canada you should also know where the mail is and check it regularly. It is crucial to remember the dates of payment, any delay can generate big problems with the landlord and even get to become legal problems; utilities such as electricity, water, internet, telephone and gas are included in the rent must also be paid by the tenant either with the rent or separately. (Refugee Center Online)
2. Code of Conduct: The Code of Conduct establishes rules related to behavior in the community. Examples of this are the prohibition of hanging clothes on balconies, not making noise at a certain time, not praying in communal areas, not leaving toys in communal areas. Due to the cultural differences between Canada and Syria there were some problems in London such as the eviction of some families from their Syrian refugee housing because the children made too much noise. (Lalani, 2016)
3. Rights: The following rights are some examples of rights that should be known by Syrian refugees upon arrival in London:

- Heat: Due to the climate in Canada, it is necessary that the landlord provide parking for the apartment from September to June.
  - Privacy: Refugees should know that the landlord can enter the home to make repairs.
  - Control rent increases: The increase in rent is made every 12 months
  - Children in the Home: Children can only make noise that is reasonable without disturbing neighbors. (Refugee Center Online)
4. Language: All lease contracts are in English, so a translator is required to be available for the time and day the contract is to be signed. The same applies to the rights and duties of landlords that must be translated into the Syrian language. It is necessary that the Syrian refugees know the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the respect for the multiculturalism contained in the Constitution of Canada, no owner can exercise any discrimination by race, place of origin or ethnic origin, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation or marital status family status; or disability.
  5. Number of members in the families: The Syrian families are made of 5 or 7 members, sometimes they can reach up to 10. Finding suitable homes has made it difficult for the agencies in charge of the settlement. Accommodating this number of people in two-bedroom apartments is not possible. Money delivered by the Federal Government or by Ontario Works does not cover large homes.
  6. Background: The Syrians have no credit history in Canada, for this reason it is very difficult for them to be accepted as tenants in London.

As London has hosted one of the largest numbers of Syrians in Ontario, a fairly high occupation point has been generated. According to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CCHHC) *"the rental vacancy rate for the London-St. Thomas area stood at 2.1 per cent in October, down*



*sharply from 2.9 per cent in the same month last year. That's the area's lowest vacancy rate since 2003, and well below its level in the fallout of the 2008 recession when it's as high as five per cent.*

*The influx of Syrian immigrants is the main factor in the drop, the CMHC said.” (Daniszenwski, 2016)*

Some refugees prefer to continue living in London because home prices are lower and their vacancy rate was lower than the Greater Toronto Area (1.3 per cent), considered the largest Canadian destination for immigrants. The London-area vacancy rate has now fallen below other Ontario cities. For example: Hamilton and Ottawa have (both three per cent), Windsor (2.9 per cent) and Kitchener (2.2 per cent). (Daniszenwski, 2016)

London Free Press by Hank Daniszewski said, *“about 1,075 rental units were added to the London-area market over the past year, a 2.5-per-cent increase, but that jump in supply still didn't keep up with the demand.”* (Daniszenwski, 2016)

The inconveniences that generated complaints from the Landlords and neighbors, such as the high volume of voice, the noise in the apartments and prayers in the common areas were expected due to the fact that the settlement process of the Syrians was very short and it was not possible to train to refugees prior to arrival in London. (Azurra, 2016)

As a lesson learned, we must look for other options to avoid any type of conflict relating to the housing. Options such as training for owners, landlords, neighbors and citizens in general about the learning process of refugees and the need for tolerance of the whole community through

campaigns or seminars. Understand that the process of accommodating Syrians requires time and patience.

Although the agencies responsible for the settlement of refugees in London were aware that they were large families, many problems arose due to the lack of resources and the number of family members housed in very small apartments. Other lesson learned, the city of London should previously make an analysis of the conformation of the families coming to London and the housing availability. After that, a decision to commit on the acceptance of families with big number of members would happen accordingly to the housing resources.

### 3.3. Culture

In this area, the aspects of the Syrian culture and its differences with the Canadian, stands out. Before talking about differences, it is important to understand the concept of culture, race and belief. According to Kim Ann Zimmermann of Live Science, *"Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts."* (Zimmermann, 2017)

The Center for Advance Research on Language Acquisition defines culture as *"as shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding that are learned by socialization. Thus, it can be seen as the growth of a group identity fostered by social patterns unique to the group."* (Zimmermann, 2017)

The most significant aspects of the Syrian culture and the difference with the culture in London are the family, society and food. Family is the key to the Syrian society and it is from this perspective that the other cultural aspects are developed. They are patriarchal families where the head of the family is the man of the house. He is the one who works and decides how each family member should behave. Loyalty, honor and respect are factors that must be followed continuously. On the other hand, the woman is the one in charge of the chores of the house and the upbringing of the children. Syria men and women tend to socialize separately except when they are sharing as a family. The interaction in society people stand close together and uses loud voice volumes and gestures, much more than in Canadian society.

Food is a significant part of the expression of the Syrians. For most of them their diet does not allow the consumption of pork, alcohol, certain meats and animal products. It is common to eat with the hands and for this the right hand is used. The food is quite seasoned due to the amount of species used.

In contrast with the London society where families are usually small with no more than two children and the society in general is not young. Fast foods are common, men and women work equally, the chores of the house are done equally between men and women. Generally, high levels of noise are not allowed only in certain occasions.

Religion in Syria plays a very important role. *"Syria's population is 74 per cent Sunni Muslim, 13 per cent Alwai, Ismali and Shia Muslim, 10 per cent Christian and three per cent Druze."* (Levitz, Jan 2015). *The persecution for religious reasons in Syria is very frequent. According to*

*the National Post, "level of diversity, and of religious freedom, is something I was not able to experience in Syria in recent years." For this reason, the Syrian refugees who had the opportunity to settle in Canada found a country where there is religious freedom. The constitutional prohibition of religious discrimination is forbidden."* (Berthiaume, 2015)

As a lesson learned, regarding the cultural background of the Syrian refugees the integration to the London society should take place as quickly as possible. All the programs carried out by the city that promotes inclusion and diversity are basic elements of coexistence that help to build stronger and safer communities. Programs and continuous cultural integration workshops are a need for a good integration.

### **3.4. Health**

When Canada committed to accepting 25,000 Syrians refugees, it began a series of research and medical programs for settling refugees. Canada has been able to demonstrate its experience in the organization and medical recognition. However, health problems have arisen that may be difficult to approach due to cultural aspects. For example, most health concerns are considered private and not even doctors can ask. Even asking questions about their life or any traumatic events at the refugee camps are rarely appropriate, as they may cause high levels of stress and anxiety.

Despite cultural differences, Syrian refugees in Ontario do not have to worry about health because the services are provided by the Federal government and the Province. The health system in Ontario is the OHIP. To be a beneficiary of this health system, Syrians must fill out an

application form with the help of an interpreter in most cases. They should also look for the family doctor and for this they can count on the help of the LCCLC. (Settlement.Org, 2016)

It is known by Canada that Syrians refugees have lived a life in vulnerable conditions. Lack of health care, limited access to food, lack of drinking water, heat, cold and rain have had a major negative impact on the health of Syrian refugees. Not in vain Canada prior to the arrival of the Syrians to the country makes the complete medical examination in the refugee camps, where they find a large number of common respiratory diseases, infections, diarrhea, lice, diabetes, and some cases of tuberculosis. Once they land in Canada, a new evaluation is done to detect infectious diseases and immunize them. Vaccination programs for babies and children were also provided. Obviously, due to the amount of difficulties that Syrians have suffered for so many years, several cases of mental problems have occurred. The follow-up of these cases has been positively provided in the city of London and will continue to be done on a regular basis. This is a lesson learned and the results have been favorable. Nonetheless, there was several health logistics problems found in London. For example, the need of a special room for the care of sick Syrians at the LCCLC houses. It is noteworthy that the procedure performed by the St Joseph group was good. Moreover, it was easier to move a medical group to attend a large number of refugees who were in the same building than to move them to a medical center.

However, an area must be prepared specifies that it meets the conditions to provide the service. (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018)

In general, it was found that the refugees had throat and ear infections, skin rashes, pregnancy problems, malnutrition, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, dental problems with pain, diabetes and kidney damage. The medicines have also been delivered free of charge. Many Syrians have arrived with mental traumas in some severe cases and in other cases, over time, more serious cases have developed. Additionally, some cases such as the loss of loved ones or friends have generated disorientation, depression and anxiety. They also suffer from headaches or simply dislike with others for no apparent reason. All these cases have been dealt with effectively and at the required time. At this point it is clear that the work done by the government and London have been excellent and it only remains to say that the lesson has been developed in a positive way. Nevertheless, one of the constant complaints of the Syrians has been the lack of translators who will be able to do their services as soon as an emergency appears and to translate the medical prescriptions that come in Arabic. (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018)

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I must highlight the need of having adequate settlement programs ready to meet the needs of refugees and provide support as quick as possible.

Immigrants to Canada, being a multicultural country, play a very important role. This is the economic support engine of the country. The experience in receiving refugees in Canada has evolved considerably, to the point of creating two systems in which refugees can be admitted to the country. Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) who are those who receive economic support from the Federal government for one year; and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) who are sponsored by the private sector who offer them financial support and assistance for their

settlement for the term of one year. With these two programs, Canada demonstrates that joint work between the government and the private sector can work focusing on the same objectives, offering protection and support in settlement in a new country.

I observed that those who arrived in London from GAR arrived in more vulnerable conditions than those sponsored by the private sector. As much as the city of London and the organizations did their best to provide the tools for a successful settlement, the refugees who arrived in more vulnerable conditions required more time and more help to feel themselves included in society.

In relation to employment, the lack of a high level of education, not having the certificates of studies in Syria and the lack of language, made the search for employment more complicated. If a program of immersion in English is established for the most vulnerable and a centralized jobs database is organized where the information finds a match with the knowledge or experiences of the refugees, finding of employment would be more effective and agile.

Despite the problems that were presented by the number of members of the Syrian families and the resources provided by the government, the City of London resolved these challenges in a positive way. To solve the problem the organizations provided two houses properly equipped to receive them and contract several hotels to provide the required assistance. The effort to give a good service by this organization was enormous as they did not rest until they resolved any inconvenience arise in this aspect.

Despite the cost of housing, the Syrians had to settle for living in smaller apartments. The organizations looked for the houses that most suited the families and the Syrians had to accommodate the houses they found. It was the joint work that led to the achievement of the settlement.

Living in a country where cultures are different, both the Canadian community and Syrian communities had to accept cultures and adapt despite initial difficulties. All settlement process is a work between two parties. However, to avoid initial difficulties, it is advisable to carry out frequent programs and seminars prior to the arrival of the refugees in Canada, which generate the knowledge and behavior patterns consistent with the Canadian culture without losing their own cultural roots.

Regarding to the Health, it is necessary to highlight that Canada has one of the best health systems in the world. This provision of health services is quite broad, since it covers all Canadians, residents and even refugees. In the case of the Syrians, medical attention crossed the Canadian borders, as people who were eligible to migrate to Canada were subject to medical examinations in the refugee camps. Locating in London I could conclude that the main problem presented was the lack of available translators in cases of medical emergencies. This situation could be solved if the organizations had a database of people trained to translate and who could provide the service at any time.

Throughout the document we were able to realize that the effort made by the City of London and its organizations has brought good results. The positive results will be seen with the time. The



process of settling a community that has suffered so much and that seeks to get ahead will be rewarded with time and patience within a community that supports them constantly.

The effort of the City Hall, the organizations, the churches, and the community together focusing on doing the best job for the settlement of the Syrians has been achieve so far. That shows that joining effort and working together makes a community strong. Despite those who thought it would not be possible, a good job was done.

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